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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 LAGOS 000024

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WARSAW FOR LISA PIASCIK

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/11/2016

TAGS: PREL PGOV PHUM KDEM NI

SUBJECT: APGA REGROUPS, SEEKING TO REMAIN A FACTOR IN IGBO POLITICS

REF: ABUJA 1954

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Classified By: Consul General Brian L. Browne for reasons 1.4 (b and d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Visits with All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) officials in Enugu and Abia States reveal a bruised party looking to regain support and goodwill lost during the intraparty fighting of the last two years. A predominantly Igbo party, APGA saw apparent electoral success in the 2003 federal and state elections in the southeast foiled by vote-rigging. The party itself split in 2005 when it expelled its mercurial Chairman, who was consorting with People's Democratic Party (PDP) officials, particularly against the attempt of APGA candidate Peter Obi to claim the Anambra gubernatorial seat. The PDP holds the power and purse strings in the states of the Igbo southeast but has little genuine support with the populace, APGA supporters argue. With current incumbents no longer in the picture in all southeastern gubernatorial and many national assembly races, APGA faces a golden opportunity to claim some seats if it can maintain popular support and neutralize vote-manipulation by other parties. Whether the party, itself a house divided, can be a factor in the 2007 elections in the southeast will be heartily dependent on whether it can close ranks quickly. End summary.

Electoral Success of APGA Foiled Again and Again

¶2. (U) APGA is the major opposition party in the Southeast. APGA registered prior to the 2003 election and adopted the game cock as its symbol, appropriating to itself the mascot of the defunct National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC), founded by revered Igbo leader Nnamdi Azikiwe. The use of this mascot was intended to portray APGA as the keeper of the Azikiwe legacy and of the Igbo flame. APGA fielded candidates mostly in the Southeast, and fielded a presidential candidate, Dim Chukwuemeka Ojukwu, the Biafran War leader who, for many people, is the most important figure in Igbo politics after Azikiwe.

¶3. (C) In the 2003 election, the general consensus was APGA would have won two or three of the five governorships in the Southeastern states had the election results been accurately counted. APGA eventually did acquire the Anambra State governorship, but only after APGA candidate Peter Obi won a protracted three-year court battle to overturn the fraudulent 2003 election result. This court victory was due in part to the machinations of Special Presidential Advisor Andy Uba as well as to APGA's ability to convince the courts of their victory.

¶4. (C) Uba craved the ouster of PDP maverick governor Chris Ngige and was willing to countenance Obi's assumption of the office to achieve this goal. Immediately thereafter, Uba started planning Obi's exit. Thus, Obi's success was short-lived as the PDP-dominated state assembly impeached him November 2006. (Note: APGA in 2003 probably won a majority of the state assembly seats in Anambra but the seats were given to the PDP. End note.) The impeachment led to the elevation of Deputy Governor and APGA party member Virginia Etiaba to the governorship. While Etiaba is an APGA member, Uba holds significant influence over her. Uba was also recently named the PDP's gubernatorial candidate in Anambra. As things now stand, Uba and the PDP have seized the advantage from APGA in Anambra.

Majority View: Okorie's Corruption,
Disloyalty to Party Caused Split

¶5. (U) In 2005, APGA fractured. APGA National Treasurer Victor Umeh and a majority of the national executive committee accused Party Chairman Chekwasi Okorie of embezzling 60 million Naira (approximately 470,000 USD) from the APGA treasury. Umeh also castigated Okorie for trying to

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undermine the court case of Peter Obi. According to the allegation, Okorie was more interested in controlling the party and not seeing an alternative and potentially rival power emerge within the party. Consequently, Okorie feared that should Obi attain Anambra's gubernatorial seat, Obi would soon begin to eclipse Okorie within the party. Thus Okorie bounced between dalliances with the PDP and Anambra's embattled Governor Chris Ngige, in a bid to keep Obi in check. In 2005, Umeh led four of the five APGA board members in a vote to suspend Okorie. Umeh, leading what became known as the majority faction of APGA, replaced Okorie as Chairman. Okorie loyalists formed the minority faction.

Minority View: Umeh Performed PDP's Bidding

¶6. (C) Of course, the prism through which the minority faction sees these events creates an entirely different picture. Longman Nwachukwu, party chairman of the Abia State APGA, defended the faction loyal to Okorie. APGA has a lot of problems in leadership, Nwachukwu complained. Twice then-Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) Chairman Abel Guobadia ignored a court ruling in favor of the minority APGA faction. An Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) investigation of the charges of misappropriation turned up nothing, Nwachukwu asserted.

¶7. (C) When the crisis broke, Okorie tried to expel Umeh but could not as Obasanjo protected Umeh, Nwachukwu bitterly contended. The National PDP used bribes to convince Umeh and three other board members to split APGA and depose Okorie. After the split, INEC Chairman Guobadia quickly recognized the Umeh faction as the real APGA. (Note: INEC's recognition means only the majority faction can field candidates. End note.) INEC is acting out a script written by the PDP and trying to factionalize and confuse the opposition, Nwachukwu groused. Despite the crisis, Nwachukwu insisted APGA was

still intact. However, Nwachukwu charged that "PDP miscreants had vandalized and destroyed APGA posters and boards". Moreover, Nwachukwu griped that the majority faction is participating in the disorder by "Going around circulating materials designed to break the peace by provoking violence."

¶8. (C) Nwachukwu showed Poloff a letter from the factional Abia State APGA addressed to the USG, decrying its mistreatment by INEC and requesting a denunciation of INEC's recognition of Victor Umeh as Chairman of APGA. In the letter, Nwachukwu reiterated the charges that hooligans posing as APGA members were distributing malicious documents designed to implicate APGA's minority faction in supporting violence. Unfortunately, "APGA lacks money or power to defend itself," Nwachukwu lamented. (Comment: Nwachukwu is right - the majority faction did sidle up to the PDP. So did Nwachukwu's group but for different reasons. The Umeh faction worked with the PDP to get their Anambra gubernatorial candidate Peter Obi in office. The Okorie faction tried to work with the PDP to keep Obi out. Finally, in his bid to suffocate Obi's ambition, Okorie offered then-governor and PDP outcast Chris Ngige membership in APGA in hopes that this would numb APGA support for Obi. Okorie also hoped that by throwing the party-less Ngige the choice of party affiliation, Ngige would respond by throwing the cash-strapped Okorie a bit of financial subvention. End comment.)

PDP Seen as the Way to Power

¶9. (SBU) Osita Nnamani Ogbu, Director of the Centre for Democratic Justice and Rule of Law (CDRL) in Enugu, told Poloff that all opposition parties are "struggling against the PDP apparatus". People are sympathetic but believe APGA does not have a chance, Ogbu stated. Ambitious politicians believe joining the PDP is the surest way to power, as people believe the party that controls the vote tabulation will win

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and that the PDP controls vote tabulation, Ogbu stated.

¶10. (SBU) Ogbu attributed the current low registration turnout to voter apathy as much as to INEC's bumbling. People think they are wasting time registering, Ogbu said. Compared to 2003, the voter rolls in Enugu are far less populated. Ogbu anticipates the PDP will keep blank voter registration cards and insert pictures to perpetrate fraudulent voting. As Ogbu described it, people think the PDP has a "Box of 10,000 voter registration cards stored somewhere."

¶11. (SBU) A member of the Transition Monitoring Group, an EU-supported body that monitors elections, Ogbu commented that in 2003 the level of violence in Enugu was high. This time people are frightened. They want to oppose the PDP, but violence in Enugu was so bad last time people are afraid.

This time, they believe, the government was even better prepared, having consolidated its power, and could make the situation worse than in 2003 for opposition parties, Ogbu told Poloff.

APGA Regroups, Claims Popular Support

¶11. (U) Seeking to regroup, APGA held its national convention in Enugu on the weekend of December 2. At the convention, APGA again nominated septuagenarian Ojukwu as its presidential candidate.

¶12. (SBU) Ogbu stated that APGA support was genuine, despite the internecine struggles. PDP support on the other hand was superficial, rallies were well-orchestrated and crowds often

rented. Sympathy has stayed with APGA and its symbol of Igbo nationalism, Ojukwu. "Igbo hearts have been with Ojukwu because he has been the most consistent politician", Ogbu stated. Enugu State APGA Chairman Okechukwu Nkoloagu insisted to Poloff that the Enugu APGA is doing well, and remains the only democratic force in the state.

¶13. (C) Comment: Ojukwu remains APGA's leader. Although age has reduced the brightness and heat of his flame, his name still stirs the Igbo psyche. His presence will ensure significant support for APGA. However, the internecine split will hurt the party as well as the disappointing tenure of Peter Obi as Anambra's governor. Obi's successor is a novice and will likely be no match for the PDP's candidate in Anambra. The other four southeastern gubernatorial races will be without an incumbent involved and the PDP is splintered in some of these states. APGA candidates, such as the son of the late respected leader Michael Okpara, Uzodinma Okpara, will contest the gubernatorial races in the Southeast. Moreover, APGA candidates for state and national assembly could give their PDP opponents stiff races. APGA's success ultimately will depend on its ability to heal the internal wounds and to demand a free and fair process in the southeast on election day. End Comment.

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